

STUDENT LEADERSHIP DEMAND AND PROBLEM OF THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

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INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a subjective concept that can be applied in diverse ways, depending on the circumstances either negative or positive (Ubong and Wokocha, 2001). Subjective as the concept of leadership is, it is definable in relationship with power. Galbraith (1984) used Max Weber's definition of power to make leadership more understandable. In the authors' view, power is the factor for imposing one's will upon the behaviour of other persons. Leadership therefore becomes practicable when one person or group can be influenced by another. Stressing further, Koontz, O' Donnell and Weihrich (1980) define leadership as the art or process of influencing people so that they will strive willingly toward the achievement of group goal. Katz and Khan (1966) synthesize leadership as definable in three categories. The author puts it that leadership can have an attribute of position, leadership as character of a person and leadership as a category of actual behaviour. Most definitions of leadership fall within all or some of the above categories. However, a leader is a person who carries her/his subjects along and it demands cooperation. Bass (1981) sees leadership as a process of influencing group activities towards the achievement of goals.

On effective leadership, Nyerere (1976) viewed a leader as not all knowing, not most intelligent, most honest, but a leader is one so chosen and accepted. Therefore to be an effective and efficient leader, there has to be a stint that drives the leader towards achievement of consciousness. A leader must be a source of inspiration to others she/he must be a motivator, one who has team spirit, an accountable person, a fit and competent person. It can be summed up that a competent leader would be regarded as a good manager.

In this paper, leadership connotes a goal directed achiever whose leadership activity receives support of the lead.

Purpose

The paper discusses leadership, vis a vis students or the youth leadership style in the Nigerian higher institution. The paper also explains some of the problems of youth and those of educational system. It concludes with suggestions for aspiring future leaders.

Youth, including students, are people within the age of 15 to 35 years. In some cases, the age may be less than 35. The youth are shakers and builders of a nation. In times of war, it is the youth that go to war.

In most developing countries of the world, the youth, who constitute a significant proportion of a country's population, organize the power together to determine the strength of a nation. Youth have determination in their mind to organize and achieve pre-determined objectives. Such determination especially becomes very prominent when the goal is a collective decision. Cambridge dictionary (1997) defines youth as the period of one's life when one is young or in a state of being young. In most Nigerian high schools and universities, youth between the ages of 15 to 25 years and above are already familiar with student leadership because all higher institutions of learning with the exception of some privately owned universities permit students' unionism. Therefore, wherever a student's union body is not found in Nigerian universities, the explanation would be that the union is bound there.

One characteristic that makes a young student a good leader is reflected in the will power of a person or group of persons that see themselves as possessing the skills and

abilities to lead others. There are different ways by which the young leaders administer the subjects that they govern.

Leadership Styles And Followership

There are all forms of leadership follower-ship. Some people follow their leaders by persuasion. Follower-ship by persuasion is the form of leadership that makes use of persuasion to increase the number of followers. It is also known as charismatic leadership. Another style of leadership that students use is the democratic or shared leadership. The democratic or shared leadership is a system of government that is based on freedom and equality that has been signed between people. Democracy is also known as a government of the people by the people and for the people.

There is yet another leadership style that is not popular among student leaders. This is the form of leadership that is forced on the larger population of students and most of the time which is not an acceptable style by the majority of students. Leaders in tertiary institutions that make others follow them through cohesion or by force run the risk of being impeached. Such leaders do not get the support of the authorities of such universities either.

Autocratic leadership describes a situation whereby an association is run by a single person or small group of people that has unlimited power. Such leadership is termed authoritative. As stated earlier, a leader who rules her/his subjects by force can be described as he is using a system where the leadership is disapproving. A dictator would therefore exercise much power over the subjects that are being lead. Student leadership may sometimes take this pattern and if unchecked, it may assume a form of dictatorship especially when the power is achieved by force. While the Nigerian Students Union (NUSA) does not allow such leadership style, the chances of its practice may exist in isolation of the national body that brings all the unions together under the umbrella of the Nigerian Union of Students Association.

Among all the types of leadership, shared leadership is most tolerated by Nigerian students, because, in most cases, its practice would look like power that is being

exercised in a democratic setting. Youth movements in the religious and secular settings, in and out of some of the Nigerian university campuses, operate with a constitution that serve as a guide to practice the sharing of power. It also serves as a check and balance system for the officers who dispense power. Therefore, in times of dispute within the system, or with the university, students leaders and members reflected on the written constitution that guides them.

In Nigeria, there are over seventy-eight (78) universities, sixty-four (64) colleges of education and nineteen (49) polytechnics. The youth in the various institutions of learning organize themselves to have their leaders. In most cases the composition of students' union leadership comprise the elected president and other executive members. The students' union election is keenly contested, but sometimes it ends up in violence leading to closure of the institution. That happens on rare occasion, however, most of the time, the elections are conducted orderly and went on smoothly. Arising from the various demand and problems of students union "government," in most of the Nigerian universities, the unions are often proscribed when their demand appears unreasonable to the university authorities and when protest assume a dangerous dimension that could be a threat to the life of people in the community. Usually, it was only at that point when the students' movement's actions tend towards uncontrollable violence, that could lead to loss of life that all the students' are sent home. The questions arises there, "whether there is need for students' leader".

The Need For Student Leadership

Under the circumstance where there is a problem of increasing number of higher institutions in Nigeria, with lack of modern infrastructure, teaching facilities, obsolete equipment, and soaring high cost of education, especially within the privately owned universities. The only person who can act as an agent and complaint is the students' leader. The federal governments' often disagree with students' ideology on why Nigerian education should be tuition free. There are several other burning issues that could not be discussed openly but affect the smooth

development of the country's institution of learning. It is such situation of disagreement that gives rise to students' agitation.

Often times the students come together to address burning issues, as the political and social-economic system of the country affects them. At the micro-level, students in higher institution of learning demand for improvement of their welfare. Students want portable water, constant supply of electricity, free education; reinstatement of their members that may be on suspension or of others that have been rusticated unjustly or for having infringed on the rules.

Students do violently protest to objectively achieve their goal, Student also often organize, elect new leaders that seek for ways of dialoging with the authority that they consider will attend to their course. This new approach is what the leadership of the Nigerian universities need to be imbibed as peaceful co-existence of the people.

At the Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife in Nigeria, the number of students' are large (25,000) but those who take decision on behalf of the majority may not be more than a volatile few that have leadership experience. It is true that there is a structure put in place for the student union body and it is respected. The authorities of the institution give support to the leadership to ensure smooth running of the system. It should not be a surprise to observe some students rather than concentrating on their academic motive for which they are in school, become engrossed in campus politics. There are far- fetched reasons for the action.

Some of the advantages that the student union members enjoy by belonging to the body may include; protection from the arm of the university law that is charged with the duty of meting out punishment on unruly students. Members of the union also derive psychological protection through the consciousness of the members belonging to a group. Members have the opportunity of fighting collectively for their rights through the respected leadership. One reason why student leadership is needed to champion the cause of other students is to influence the general students' body to be law abiding while in side

the campus. The student leadership is also seen to act as a bridge between the authority and all other students. It could be true that leaders are made and not born.

Are Leaders Born Or Made?

Experience has proved the fact that leaders are made; the experience of the developed world is a case for the statement made. In America some form of compulsory military training was given as a result of which a leader of the future was made through leadership training. They are therefore better empowered with the skills to lead their country after being democratically elected to lead. The students have the power to change their destiny if given the right training. Unfortunately, the lack of a clearly defined structure that serves as a training ground for the Nigerian students very often exposes their youthful exuberance. This attitude ruins the power they have in their hands to change their destiny. For example, it is the youth that build a nation and this is because of their collective strength. It is also the youth that ensure that there is continuity of economic and socio-political power of nations.

Nigeria, like other developed and developing countries have some undefined youth that would perpetrate negative vices in various walk of lives through efarious activities if unchecked. While some of the negative practices of students are known, some other youth are already breaking new grounds in music, in medicine, in humanities and in the field of social science. Youth are taking interest in advancing the frontiers of knowledge.

But the toll of unemployment on the Youth has to be considered with immediate effect. Recently, it was found that about 5,000,000 Nigerian youths that passed out from school system annually remain unemployed.[Nigerian tribune 5th Sep, 2006]. Unemployment of graduate students having gone through higher institution of learning should be viewed with concern.

Conclusion

There are different forms of leadership styles in practice, but most student leaders adopt the democratic system.

Since student leadership is an off shoot of the practices of

the larger society, it is felt that the university environment ought to be a molding ground for good leadership. On the other hand to create an avenue for good leadership, African students generally need to question their cultural heritage and their value systems seriously. Student leaders often mimic and put into practice what African leaders do either correctly or incorrectly. African leaders should be willing to break away from copying the western world politics, and break their ignorance, cultural amnesia, and colonial alienation and create a place for leadership of the world in the 21st century.

Student leaders can be trained to imbibe the right value, and culture as good leadership. While acknowledging the fact that certain individuals are born with a natural ability to lead, there is the necessity to inculcate the right set of values in the mindset of the student leader. The people with good leadership skills, but with little or no ethical and moral values which guide the nature of their decisions as leaders should not be elected as a student leader.

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